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A GENERAL VIEW OF THE CHRISTIAN DISPENSATION,

*In a Charge to the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of London, at the Visitation, May 16, 1817. By Joseph Holden Pott, M. A. Archdeacon of London:*

[Concluded from page 186]

It remains only to observe the course which our Lord's Apostles followed in their Ministry, of which the record and the pattern, rest for us. And once more, you will see that such persons as the grave and bountiful Cornelius, the devout Greeks in multitudes, the noble-minded converts of Berea, the prudent Deputy, were among the first fruits of the Gospel, and were received with commendation by our Lord's Apostles; whilst the feeble and the broken-hearted, they who were wearied with the errors of their way, and the burden of their sins, were called also to the springs of succour, and received to the sure ground of pardon and good hope. You will perceive too, the regard which the Apostles had to cherish and promote the spiritual growth in those whom they converted, as it was to flourish with a regular and gradual increase. If I dwell much on this topic, it is because I know no other more clear and more cer-

tain in itself, and yet more slighted and disclaimed, where exaggerated views are entertained. That natural and rational increase, is described to us in many a lively figure; it is pressed by many a cogent exhortation to grow in grace; declared by many a testimony from which those holy witnesses, gifted as they were, did not exclude their own case. To their converts they proposed things suited to their apprehensions; they treated them as children; and indeed they were such in their whole capacity for spiritual things. Their prayers for them was that they might by degrees abound yet more and more, in knowledge and in all judgment, and at length approve things excellent. With this view their converts are exhorted to add one measure of improvement to another: to faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity; where they are also told that by such proficiency, if they did such things they should never fall, but if they lacked them, they would shew that they had forgotten that they were purged from their old sins. With the same view they who were careless, tardy and deficient in their progress, were reprov'd accordingly, and reminded, that when for the time, they ought to be teachers, they

had need that one should teach them again.

They used their first pains with their countrymen, but when the greater part of them despised the proffered mercy, they said plainly, "since ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life; lo, we turn to the Gentiles."

In the case of heathen converts, many in the first age were converted and baptized with speed, in great numbers, and with extraordinary effusions of the Spirit, suited to those days, when they who carried out the tidings of salvation were passing rapidly from place to place. They put their seal therefore to such as pressed into the fold; and in due time they settled a fixed Ministry among them: and then we find that the standing means and ordinary course were every where established, together with the gradual methods of instruction and proficiency. These rules of prudence and propriety, from the earliest years of life to the latest moments of its course, adapt themselves to the growth of man; they take up the child from the font of baptism; they form his first accents to the rudiments of saving knowledge, and the word of prayer; and yet they look for no more from the child, than consists with childish years, however seasoned with that Grace which accompanies in every stage of access or proficiency the grant of pardon, and the privileges of adoption.

It is injurious surely in no light degree to the best and noblest dispensations of God's kindness, to think that the Christian household possesses no fixed rule or certain scheme of safe conduct and proficiency, by which the ways of spiritual growth, and its regular increase, are ordered and disposed

from first to last. To what then serve the dews of baptism, and the early breath of prayer? To what serves the prudent eye of honoured parents and religious guides; the converse of the mild and good; the pattern of the sober and discreet; the love that spares no pains, and fears no sacrifice; the kind encouragement which calls up and strengthens every generous sentiment; the well-timed praise; the cautious censure; the sincere example which molds all to itself?

Did the rule of Solomon for training youth, belong only to a former dispensation; or is it superseded by new privileges? Will it be objected that we trust to the efficacy of such means, and substitute mechanical impressions which do but touch the surface for those which influence the heart? Do they deserve this censure who place no reliance upon any means but under the guidance and corrective influences of the promised grace which accompanies the Christian course; and who regard the loan of life, at all times, as a talent to be put to use, in order to our best improvement, in the day of trial?

Does it now seem an unfit thing to say that the ways of grace are evermore adapted to those of nature, in which common reason will prescribe one gift and one lesson for the child, and another for the man? That such was the course of Providence, even where the works of miracle were wrought, in which the deviation from the settled orders of the universe, was seldom more than was just needful to mark the divine interposition, has been frequently observed: and that such was the course prescribed and pursued by those who collected the first families into the fold of Christ, is indubitably true. Although the Spirit, as



in all times, wrought together with the word; no one faculty of the human mind was overset, nor was the course of nature turned aside, but all was succoured and improved: defects supplied, and what remained of any good ability, recruited and augmented. Even in the day of inspiration, St. Paul describes his own proficiency in terms of exact analogy to every rational attainment, and to every duteous service and endeavour. "I count not myself," said he, "to have apprehended, but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Extend the view a little, and regard the settled course which the Apostle fixed in all the Churches which he planted. We know well what that method was, it was the way of Providence; in which a seed is first sown, and the blade springs, and the stalk rises, and the grain swells to maturity. It was the way which he prescribed in the place last cited, where he adds, "let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the 'same thing:'" that from henceforth, according to a former warning given by him, "they might no more be as children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine." Can we forget another memorable word of his? In the very time of high degrees of spiritual gifts, of tongues, and miracles, even then, he plainly told men, that there was something yet more excellent than those powers which had some special purpose for their end. And what was that more excellent and perfect way? It was the way of Charity; the gradual, patient, well pursued advances in the ways of duty, and the path of trial. It was

the chastened and well governed disposition of the mind and life, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; the progress to be made, from day to day, in the quiet, sober, constant, uniform, and noiseless path of man's reasonable service.

Again we find the scheme of Christian worship and assembly, pressed with peculiar exhortations and injunctions, as those exercises which were never more to be remitted or forsaken in all ages. We find the Christian Sabbath also specially observed, and the glad memorials of our Lord's resurrection coupled with the perpetual duties and unchanging obligation of the Sabbath instituted by the great Creator.

We find, too, the scheme of discipline for the corrigible or the refractory, exemplified in the fullest manner, and established in the Christian Churches.

I need not, my Reverend Brethren, remind you further of what must form the frequent topic of your earnest applications to the minds and consciences of men. You know well, that when the path of duty and good hope shall have been forsaken for any devious or forbidden way, the same merciful Redeemer, whose first word was, "Repent;" speaks still; and the call is still made to bring men to that gate of refuge and recovery. The prodigal must then tread back his steps to the threshold of his father's house; with every quickening motive to speed his course. The terrors of a guilty mind; the hateful and degrading character of sin; the danger of delay; the certainty of loss, and shame, and misery without end, if there be no timely flight from every evil way; all these press, jointly and severally, for attention in the day of penitence, and the season of unfeigned contrition.

If there are any who prefer less usual methods of describing this great change of heart, when evil habits come to be detested, and the path of duty is again sought or recovered, let us at least employ due caution, lest by declining plain expressions, for those which are more difficult, and of less certain explication, we make room for divisions, jealousies, suspicions; for perplexities and doubts in tender minds, and for censures and determinations in the case of others which may be much misplaced, and to which no human arbiter can be sufficient.

All men can understand and few can miss, in their own case, or in that of others, the substantial witness of a true repentance, as it consists in a remorse for past misdeeds, a thorough purpose to forsake all sinful ways, with a subsequent and suitable amendment, by every exercise of faith and righteousness.

Can we think that the language which so well expressed the first translation of the first converts to another household, from that in which they had their nurture, is better suited to the Christian Penitent in these days? That adoption in the first age of the Gospel constituted a complete estrangement from all former kindred and connections; it invested men with the name and privilege of another family; all which considerations, together with the phrase expressing them, had long been familiar to the Jewish people and their proselytes. Can we think that such terms, which are still applied with much significance to the first reception at the font of baptism, are as proper at this day to signify the conversion from the ways of sin and error in the case of those who have long been members of the Christian household; who return

from evil courses as faulty children, not as strangers?

I shall here close these reflections, having endeavoured to point out the paths which we have to follow if we will adhere to the methods taken, and the provisions first made in the Christian Church. Having touched these things, however rapidly, and recalled to your remembrance the course which under the directions of their Lord, the Apostles took for collecting Churches in all lands; the care they used for preventing separations and divisions in each Church, commensurate as those Churches were to be with cities, realms, and nations; the charge they gave them to speak the same thing, and to follow the same rules of faith, practice, worship, and communion; having brought these things to your minds, you must see that I do not trust to partial testimonies or opinions, but direct your view to that whole plan which was adopted and prescribed by the great Founder of our faith, of which the clear and indubitable records stand for our perpetual rule. Let it not be the peculiar scandal of our land, that any favourite tenet, however dubious, or remote from the necessary grounds of faith or duty, shall seem sufficient to induce men to undervalue these regular provisions constituted and appointed in the Christian household.

Whatever may be the comparative advantages which attend upon the settled state of Christianity, in countries which have long been blessed by its inestimable light and stated ministries; and alas! whatever may be the offences and impediments which have been put into the way of those who should walk by the same rule, and mind the same things; still we know well for our comfort, that God withholds not the needful measures of his grace from



the willing and sincere, whatever be their part in life, in order to their best progress and proficiency.

The ways of God, as well as the rule of life for those who are formed to know him, and made capable to do him service, are very uniform and certain. Having once revealed his will, and made known the treaty of salvation to mankind, and furnished every needful succour, the same testimonies rest from age to age. It is of unspeakable importance, in every stage and period of our lives, to look well to the whole scope of the great work of probation; to go on from fair beginnings, to just and regular advances. Such themes of consideration are always proper; and I trust you will excuse this call for your attention to them if it have surpassed the usual limits. Such topics are at all times seasonable, for they are the best and fittest for perpetual remembrance.

The great truths of our redemption in Christ Jesus, who took our nature with a voluntary condescension, that in him it might recover its integrity, and that from him, as a new head, every gracious influence might descend; the atonement made by him who gave himself, even to death, as a sacrifice for sin, that God might be just, and yet upon that ground of sufficient satisfaction, might justify those who had no other plea before him, but stood convinced of sin; the great privilege of access to the Father, through the Son, and by the Holy Ghost; the promise of acquittal and acceptance for Christ's only sake; the known terms of the Christian Covenant; the grace and blessings which accompany the settled ordinances of the Christian Church; the needful influence, and the quickening and effectual succour of the Holy Spirit, to enable men who before were maimed and en-

feebled, to arise and to go forward with every prospect and assurance of a glad reception on the borders of an happier scene; the rejection of all pleas of merit, together with the proud sufficiency of human reason, whatever may be the comparative degrees of understanding, or of moral worth among men; these things, my Reverend Brethren, result so plainly and so readily from the several points which have been touched, that I have no fear that I shall be thought to have taken narrow views of our common creed and bounden duty. Happy were it could we be contented without embarking in more curious disquisitions, and returning yet again to restless and interminable questions.

To consider what our Blessed Saviour required of those to whom he made the tender of salvation, and what he declares will be required at the great day of account, in which eminent particulars there is the most exact conformity in what was spoken by our Lord; to regard what we may expect with certainty in the way of furtherance and succour, if we will be true to our own interests in the day of trial; or, on the other hand, to weigh well what our departures have been from the path of duty; what our failures, our misdeeds, or neglects, and to turn to a forgiving Father with a timely and a true repentance; these I conceive to be the proper objects of the Christian Candidate. They will not lead him to confound what was applicable to the first æra of conversion, with what belongs to the settled state of Christianity; nor to look in ordinary cases for some new work of grace, subject to new tests, and distinct from that which is first pledged with every promise of increase for the dutiful, and of renewal for the humble penitent; nor will

they incline him to think, that the benefits of the Gospel are not designed for all that are brought within its pale, who do not cancel their own privilege, or forego their own hope.

Once more, let us remember that we all have to pursue the same progressive course, and to encourage in our hearts the same compendious recollections of the grounds of faith, and of the measures of religious increase, in sincerity and holiness of life.

I conclude, my Reverend Brethren with the best wish of my heart, that we may follow the same good work committed to us, with one mind, and one endeavour, in the unity of the Spirit, and the bond of peace.

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*"The Knowledge of Divine Things from Revelation, and not from Reason."—By Ellis.*

God, who is infallible, has made such revelations of himself in his word and by his works, as are necessary and sufficient for our present state. To inquire further than this, will be no more than vanity and presumption, in which men are quickly confounded; and many have lost their religion, and devotion too, by thus curiously and criminally attempting to pry into the mysteries and secrets of God. No one need be ashamed of not knowing, what God has not revealed; and he that would go further, gives up his wisdom and endangers his safety. The only sure rule is to leave off inquiring, where God leaves off to teach us; for there are bounds set to human understanding and curiosity, and there is danger in attempting to press beyond them; and it is real wisdom to desire ignorance of what God would not have us to know.

Mr. Locke has given in plain language the notions of those who suppose that the Being of God, and the other truths of religion, are discoverable by our reason, and can be demonstrated by us. "Does God propose any thing to mankind to be believed? It is very fit and credible to be believed, if reason can demonstrate it to be true. But if human reason is unable to discover it, then its credibility is lessened." This, subjoins that great man, is in effect to say, that the veracity of God, is not a firm and sure foundation of faith to rely upon, without the concurrent testimony of reason, *i. e.* God is not to be believed on his own word, unless what he reveals be in itself credible, and might be believed without him.

The scripture evidence of the soul's immortality, (or any other truth in scripture,) is not at all weakened by the discovery, that our reason could never have demonstrated or discovered it. God has revealed it, and the veracity of God is a demonstration of the truth of what he has revealed. Does the believer of Divine revelation think it less credible, that there shall be a resurrection of the body, than that the soul shall live for ever. If this be so, reason is to be consulted, how far God is to be believed, and the credit of the divine testimony must receive its force from the evidence of reason, which is evidently to take away the credibility of divine revelation in all supernatural truths, wherein the evidence of reason fails.

Reason has its province, and a very large one, but is not the measure of supernatural truths. We are Christians by faith, not by natural reason, and must therefore believe, not in ourselves, but in God, in those things which religion and not reason teaches. No foundation



is so immovable as the word of God; no demonstration so clear as the divine authority; no truth so evident as what God affirms; nor is it natural reason nor philosophical notions, but faith, which will make us acceptable to Him.

It is a glaring absurdity to say, that all great truths are discoverable by reason, and yet the greatest reasoners could never discover or fix the fundamental doctrines of reason and truth. It is indeed pretended, that revelation comes in only as an aid to nature, and that a well attested interposition of Divine authority becomes unto all men a just ground of assent to their truths, which to make out by the help of reason only, was a work of difficulty, time and study. To talk of revelation as a *crutch*, to save difficulty, time or study, is empty sophism. How comes it that the greatest men who consumed their whole time and study herein, did not accomplish it. This intellectual pride or reliance on reason, has given us in later ages lamentable instances of human frailty; by the fall of wise men into desperate errors—imagining that there was no truth for which they could not account.

There remains then no other way to come at the knowledge of the first cause, but by his own manifestations; what nature could not do, grace and mercy have supplied. By a due meditation on what has been revealed, the human mind gradually increases in the knowledge of supernatural things, till at last she grows stronger, and is able to raise herself up to a distant contemplation (all that her faculties can admit,) of the glories which encompass the Supreme Infinite. For the notices here are proportioned to our state; but reason is weak, and the natural man not capable of the

things of the Spirit, because *they are Spiritually discerned*. In these, faith is the eye, and the Spirit and word of God the light, which dispels the darkness of the mind, opens to it a new source of invisibles—the Creator of all things—glorious but immaterial substances, infinite wisdom, perfection and beatitudes, which a finite intellect could never have inquired into or discovered.

And when the first cause has thus manifested itself, the works become proper witnesses to what the word has revealed concerning his greatness and perfection. Then natural means become illustrations of the supernatural ones, and visible things an evidence of intellectuals. The grandeur, excellence, and order of the universe, are an unquestionable demonstration of the effect of infinite power and wisdom, and thus the Heavens declare the glories of the Invisible Godhead.

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*From the Almost Christian.*

Most of us are good christians in the verdict of our own opinion. The heart of man is the greatest impostor and cheat in the world. Every grace has its counterfeit. There may be the highest profession without any real conversion. He only knows God aright, who knows how to obey him, and obeys him according to his knowledge of him. "A good understanding, have all they that do his commandments."

A man may have great and eminent gifts, yea spiritual gifts, and yet be but almost a Christian. The gift of prayer is a spiritual gift. This a man may have, and be but almost a christian. The gift of preaching is also a spiritual gift. Now this too a man may have, and be

but almost a christian. Judas, was a great preacher—So were they who came to Christ, and said “Lord we have prophesied in thy name, and in thy name have cast out devils.” A graceless professor may have more gifts than the most holy believers. He may out-pray, and out-preach and out-do them, while they in sincerity and integrity, and in every thing really christian, greatly excel him.

The efficacy of the word doth not depend upon the authority or eloquence of him who speaks it; but upon God, who blesses it. God may use a man’s gifts to bring another unto Christ, when he himself, whose gifts God uses, may be a stranger unto Christ. One man may confirm another in the faith, and yet be a stranger unto the faith. It is beyond the power of the greatest gifts to change the heart. A man may preach like an Apostle, pray like an Angel, and yet may have the heart of a devil. Many will go, loaded with gifts, to hell.

The conscience of a natural man is subject to distress and trouble. God sometimes sets the word home upon the sinner’s conscience, and applies the terrors of the law to it. In this case the sinner usually betakes himself to a life of duties, or of pleasure, in order to fence trouble out of the conscience. He endeavours to forget himself in vain amusements and company, and thereby hopes to silence conscience. How often, though in the midst of gaiety and dissipation, is the sinner still wretched, and what is his assumed cheerfulness and hilarity, but a desperate effort to conceal from others, and bring himself to forget, his wretchedness and despondency?

Until the sinner be convinced of sin he can never be converted from sin. Christ’s coming was as a Sa-

viour to die for sinners. So long as sin is unseen, or thought lightly of, Christ will be unsought. Where there is thorough conviction the seed of the word will grow; but where convictions are slight or common, there the seed withers for want of depth.

Break off all false peace of conscience. There is the peace of God, and there is the peace of Satan, and they are as contrary as heaven and hell. The peace of God in the soul, is a peace flowing from the removal of guilt; but the peace of Satan arises from, and is maintained, by a stupidity of spirit, and insensibility of guilt, upon the conscience. God will have the soul truly sensible of the bitterness of sin, before it can taste the sweetness of mercy. The constant method of God is, first to shew a man his sin, and then his Saviour—first his danger then his Redeemer—first his wound, then his cure—first his own vileness, then Christ’s righteousness.

There are three things of which we should especially be convinced—

1st. The evil of sin—This is the greatest evil in the world. It wrongs God, it wounds Christ, it grieves the Holy Spirit, and ruineth a precious soul.

2d. The misery and desperate danger of a state of impenitence. Until we see the plague of our hearts and the misery of our state by nature, we shall never be brought to seek help in another.

3dly. The utter insufficiency and inability of any, save Jesus Christ, to minister relief to the guilty soul. It is an infinite righteousness, that must satisfy for us; for it is an infinite God who has been offended by us. If ever our sins be pardoned, it must be infinite mercy that pardons them; if ever we be reconciled



to God, it is infinite merit must do it. If ever our hearts be changed, and our state renewed, it must be effected by infinite power; and if our souls escape hell, and be saved at last, infinite grace alone will save them.

Get sound convictions, if you would be sound Christians. Yet never rest in convictions, and mistake them for conversion. Remember this; slighted convictions, are the worst death-bed companions. There are two things especially, which above all others make a death-bed very uncomfortable.

1st. Resolutions and promises of amendment, not performed.

2d. Convictions slighted, and not improved. When a person takes up purposes to become a child of God, and yet puts them not into execution; when he is convinced of sin and duty, and yet will not improve these convictions—O! this will sting and wound at last!

Hath the spirit of the Lord been at work in your souls? Have you ever been made to feel the evil of danger and sin, the misery of your state, and the insufficiency of all things under heaven to help you? Have you ever been taught the fullness and righteousness of Jesus Christ, and necessity of resting upon him for pardon and peace, for sanctification and salvation? O then, as you love your own souls, as ever you hope to be saved at last, and enjoy God for ever, improve these convictions, until they rise up to a sound and perfect conversion. Then you will be not almost, but altogether a christian.

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From the Christian Observer.

*Of the false ways by which men endeavour to obtain peace.*

HERE I must begin with remarking, that the strength of a person's

peace is no proof of the soundness of it. It is not unusual to see even notorious sinners dying in peace, and to meet with enthusiasts of various and opposite kinds rejoicing in a peace of mind which is not clouded by a single doubt. For let a person be only firmly convinced that he is right, and peace will follow naturally. His peace will then depend upon the strength of that conviction, and not upon the justness of it. Hence it will vary according to a person's natural temper, his modesty or his arrogance, his knowledge or his ignorance, as well as according to the doctrines he imbibes. We may learn from this view of the subject the great importance of sound scriptural knowledge and true religious principles. Where these are to be found, the probability is, that if a just peace is not to be obtained, at least a false one will not be enjoyed. A false peace must be built on error or ignorance, and these are removed by a thorough knowledge of the truths of scripture.

A false peace being built either upon erroneous views of what God requires in order to salvation, or upon erroneous ideas of the manner in which his favour is made known to us, it is obvious, that in order to try the foundation of our peace, we must examine whether our views are just concerning the terms of salvation, and the necessary evidence of the safety of our state. I shall begin with the first of these.

1. It is far from being uncommon in the world to hear a person declare his religious creed in such terms as these: "Whatever bigots may affirm, or enthusiasts believe, I am certain that God is our merciful father, and will make allowance for the frailties of his creatures. He knows what passions he gave

us, and will surely consider their strength and our weakness. It is dishonourable to him to indulge any fear of his goodness. Possibly, indeed, it may be proper to make an example of gross hypocrites, or of those who have been flagrantly unjust, who have defrauded the widow and the fatherless, or in secret shed the blood of their neighbour. Such cases as these, to which human laws do not extend, Divine justice may reach; but as for those whose lives, allowing for human infirmity, are on the whole respectable, surely they need entertain no uneasy apprehensions."—Such are the arguments by which unchastity, drunkenness, covetousness, and the want of holy dispositions, though declared by the word of God to exclude men from heaven, are made to appear as things of no moment. Let a person receive these sentiments, it matters not upon how slight evidence—it matters not that the word of God contradicts them—and he will have peace; and this peace he will enjoy so long as he continues firm in these sentiments. He may even die in composure, as well as live without fear. It is only some uneasy fear that sin may not be so easily forgiven; some secret suggestion of conscience that all is not right within; some unwelcome remembrance of passages of scripture, declaring that repentance and holiness are necessary to salvation, which can shake this man's peace: but if he can shut his eyes to the truth; if he can contrive to engross his mind with wordly business, or corrupt his conscience with sensual pleasures; if he can, by sophistry, explain away the plain sense of the word of God; then will he return again to his state of security, and continue in undisturbed repose.

2. Such a peace as this can only

be the result of gross ignorance, and neglect of serious inquiry. Where the conscience is enlightened by some degree of scriptural knowledge, there must be something much more than this to serve as a foundation for the peace of the soul. There are persons, therefore, who seek peace by the adoption of a new religious system, perhaps a true one. Ignorant before of religion, a new world as it were now opens to their view. They read the scriptures, and they attend to religious conversation with much curiosity and desire to know the truth: a complete change perhaps takes place in their religious opinions; their imagination is alive to religion; their thoughts are occupied with it. They see with surprise the scheme of the Gospel; a new light seems to have shined into their minds; and now that they can discern the way of salvation, and that they have obtained as they doubt not, from above, such wisdom and light, they do not scruple to consider themselves as being in a safe state. They rejoice in it accordingly, and are filled with peace in thus believing.

Now, supposing the system of religion which they have adopted to be the true one, still it may be asked, does the mere belief even of the truth save the soul? Is not this what St. James condemns, when he says, "Can faith save a man?" Can a mere speculative faith, however true, save a man? Have not the very devils a clear and just conception of the most important truths? Have there not been innumerable hypocrites, who could speak with the tongues of angels, who could point out with wonderful fluency and correctness every departure from the truth, and yet whose deeds were evil? Does our Saviour, or do his Apostles tell us to depend on



our opinions, on the fancies of our minds; or the clearness of our conceptions? Our Saviour declares, "He that heareth my sayings, and doeth them, shall be likened to the wise man which built his house upon a rock." He affirms, that many shall come in that day, saying, "Lord, Lord, have we not cast out devils in thy name?" (something much more than a bare belief of the truth,) "To whom he will say, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." He declares, that he who keepeth His commandments, he it is who loveth Him. The Apostle exhorts us to beware of being deceived: "Little children" says he, "let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous." All those passages of Scripture, and I might quote whole books to the same effect, plainly prove that something more is required of us than merely adopting opinions, however true they may be.

3. Another class of persons build their peace, not upon the declarations of Scripture respecting the character of those who shall be accepted, or the invitations there given to every repenting sinner to believe in Christ and be saved, but upon some secret suggestions, some impression made on the mind, some vision or voice, some uncommon feeling, by which they imagine they are assured of the favour of God towards them. Now, granting that extraordinary things may have happened in some very particular cases, still it must be remembered that even in these, faith in the Gospel of Christ, faith in the revelation once given by Christ and by His Apostles, must be the foundation, the only foundation, for peace and hope. God does not give one revelation to supersede another: He does not

point out a hope in His word upon which we may and ought to rely, and then, rejecting that as imperfect, communicate one in a different way. "We are saved," saith the Apostle, "by faith; in another place, "by hope." They both imply the same thing, and both prove that it is not by sight, by feeling, by impressions; for these are not faith; these have not the truth revealed in Scripture for their object. While our hope and faith are built upon Scripture solely, and we appeal to the Law and to the Prophets, we rest upon the same foundation as the Apostles; but if we depart from the written word, and, neglecting that, seek for a new revelation, not that Christ died to save sinners, but that God hath saved us; then we do not build upon Christ, but upon our own feelings; we do not believe upon the authority of Scripture, but upon the authority of our own impressions: our faith and hope, our peace and comfort, stand on the foundation of these. What a door is here opened for delusion and enthusiasm! How is the attention thus drawn from the word of God, to follow an unknown guide! How do we leave the promises, to build upon the phantoms of fancy!

It must be allowed, indeed, that the Holy Spirit is the great Author of light and peace: but He communicates them, as we learn from Scripture, by impressing the truths revealed in the Bible on our hearts; by removing our prejudices against them; by disposing our hearts to attend to them; by exciting holy affections in consequence of the view we have of them. This is the work of the Spirit; but this gives us a view, not of our *particular* interest in Christ, but of that interest which all have in Him, who truly embrace the faith of the Gospel, and shew

that they do so by a holy life. Thus the Spirit testifies of Christ, not of us; fills us with joy in believing the *old*, not in receiving a *new* revelation; makes known the truths of Scripture, not truths with which Scripture is unconcerned.

I shall conclude with a remark or two, drawn from what has been said.

1. It is not to be denied, that some good persons have built their peace on those evidences which I have just laid down as unsatisfactory; but in this case, it has been their error that they have neglected what was truly a good evidence, and dwelt upon what was imperfect and unsound. We are to call no man master, however highly we may esteem him: our faith is to be built only upon the words of Christ and His Apostles. Men have erred, councils have erred, churches have erred: in one age, one opinion or system has been in fashion; in another, a different one: and there is reason to fear, that, in general, we are apt to lay too much stress upon what is peculiar to ourselves and to our party, and too little upon what is really important, and what is held to be so in Scripture.

2. We may lay it down as a maxim, that grace in the heart is far more important than light in the understanding, or than comfort and peace, however founded. The peace of the Gospel has a close connection with sanctification, as well as a manifest influence upon it. And one great evil which arises from all false ways of obtaining peace is this, that they have no necessary connection with sanctification; they are separated from it; they may subsist with an unhallowed frame of mind; and they are often valued because they remove that wholesome uneasiness and trouble for sin,

which check deviations from duty, and quicken a return into its path—which are the great instruments that God employs to keep his people humble and watchful, lively in faith, and upright in their lives. Let us then seek, by earnest study accompanied by fervent and persevering prayer, to know the will of Christ revealed in Scripture, and illustrated by his example; and then follow it. Whatever peace, or whatever feelings we have, let us mark their practical influence: if they tend to produce, not a partial, but an universal respect to all God's will, so far they are right, and all true Christian peace will tend to produce that effect. Now may the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep our hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus. Amen.

### *Hints on Public Worship.*

[Continued from page 170.]

WE now proceed to the more immediate work of *prayer, intercession, and thanksgiving*, as required by the exhortation of St. Paul to Timothy: "I exhort therefore that supplications, prayers, intercessions, with giving of thanks, be made for all men." (1 Tim. ii. 1.) This work is introduced by two short sentences, one to be used by the minister and the other by the people, the piety and simplicity of which are very affecting. The minister addressing himself to his beloved flock, says, *The Lord be with you*; and they with a return of affection, answer, *And with thy spirit*. This interchange of kind regard is such as becomes the connection between a minister and his people, while both are reminded of their dependence on the presence and blessing of the Great Head of influence to his church, for "grace whereby they



may approach God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." "Without Him we can do nothing" from right motives and to a right end. These mutual affectionate wishes having found utterance, the minister proceeds to say, *Let us pray*, and the people put themselves in the proper posture for prayer, by falling on their knees.

After an alternate cry for mercy and salvation by the minister and people, *the collect for the day* is read, except when the communion service is read. This changes every Lord's day and holiday, and is suited to the Epistle and Gospel with which it stands connected. Then follow two other *collects*, differing at morning and evening service, and containing petitions for blessings relative both to this life and to that which is to come. In these the people are to accompany their minister with the devout breathings of their hearts, and at the end of each to testify their hearty concurrence by the word *Amen*, which means, *so be it*, loudly repeated.

Then succeeds *a prayer for the President of the United States and all in civil authority*, whom God hath set over us, and under whose shadow we live in the enjoyment of our civil and religious privileges. And while the exhortation of the Apostle (1 Tim. ii. 2.) renders the use of such a prayer an indispensable duty, the blessings which we enjoy make it a high privilege.

To these prayers is added one *for the clergy and people*,—for *Bishops*, the Divinely instituted governors of the church of Christ, and for *ministers*, whether prebyters or deacons,—all who have the care of souls committed to them, by whatever other name they are distinguished. These deeply need and have a powerful claim on our

prayers. "They watch for our souls as those who must give an account." By their ministry we are introduced to the church of God at Baptism, and are instructed in our childhood and youth in those principles which are the foundation of happiness in this life, and of hope in a better. They teach us to worship God, and go before us shewing us the way to the mercy-seat. They instruct us from the pulpit what we must do to be saved, pointing us to "the Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world." From their hands we receive the sacred emblems of the body and blood of Christ. They are employed in forming the bond of domestic union, and bless it by their prayers. When we are sick, they come at our summons, examine into the nature of our repentance towards God, call forth our languid feelings of confidence in our Redeemer's grace, and arm us by the declarations and promises of his gospel against the fear of death, commending us in prayer to the mercy of our God. And, finally, when our mortal bodies have yielded to the stroke of death, they commit them to the grave in hope of the resurrection to eternal life. To these persons, under God, our obligations are many and great, and while we consider the commission which they hold from God our Saviour, our obligation to them, and the arduous nature of their duties, surely they have a claim on our daily intercessions. "Brethren, pray for us," was the earnest request of an Apostle, and it is the request of all his successors in office who know the nature of that office; and it is a request with which we ought cheerfully and earnestly to comply. In their claims our own interest unites in the performance of this duty; for unless Hermon be

watered with the dew of heaven, the hills of Zion must fail of refreshment. The ministers of God are the appointed channels of blessing to his people, and they must be watered by his grace in order that they may water others.

*The prayer for all conditions of men* is an act of intercession for the whole world, and more especially for Christ's holy "catholic church." It is a form of missionary supplication for all nations, that God's ways and his saving health, or great salvation, may be known unto them. It has long been in use; but as it has not produced its due effect in efforts to spread abroad the knowledge of the gospel, it may be feared that it has not been used aright. But it may be hoped from the missionary spirit which has latterly been excited, that we begin to feel the duty and to perceive the importance of such a petition. Whenever it is read, may we remember with melting pity and fervent desire the awful state of the heathen world, and be earnest for the promised ingathering of souls to the good Shepherd. Tasting his grace ourselves, may we be importunate that our fellow-sinners may be made partakers with us. While in this and the Lord's prayer we ask that his "kingdom may come," may we feel encouragement from the assurance that he shall "have the heathen for his inheritance and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession."—But our prayers are here offered, not for the heathen world only, but also for those "who name the name of Christ" our Lord. And surely while we consider the state of religion in our own and other countries professing Christianity, we shall feel the necessity of praying that the church may be guided and governed by God's good Spirit,

that truth, unity and peace may be restored to it and prevail in it. We pray for our brethren in affliction, generally; and no doubt can arise on the propriety of such petitions.

*The general thanksgiving* is so called, because it is a summary of all those blessings which as men and Christians we have received, particularizing creation, preservation, and redemption. It is impossible that a form for public worship, or indeed any form whatever, could specify all our obligations to Divine mercy; but in this excellent formula we are instructed in what manner a thankful spirit will necessarily shew itself, namely, in our lives, by giving up ourselves to the service of God, and by walking before him in holiness and righteousness all our days. And we are taught to implore grace from God, that we may be enabled thus to shew forth his praise. It is deeply to be regretted, that so few instances occur of persons who have requested the prayers of the church, publicly acknowledging the mercies they have received. May we not repeat the tender complaint of our blessed Lord, and say in his language, "Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine?"

[To be concluded]

#### *From the Faith and Practice of a Churchman.*

I AM so far from slighting or undervaluing the several parts of religious service, because they are prescribed, and we commanded to use those words, and no others, that I like them much the better. For as far as I can find, since miracles ceased, there always was a form of prayer and service prescribed; and it never was left to every clergyman to say what prayers, and use what form of service he pleased; much



less was an extempore prayer to God in public approved of. For besides the indecency, that will often be committed in extemporary prayers, (which surely ought to be prevented if we can, when we address ourselves to the infinite majesty of Heaven and earth in behalf of his church, as well as on the concerns of our own souls) it speaks respect to God, when we take all possible care that nothing but what is well weighed be offered to him. A prescribed form also is the only way to keep up uniformity among ourselves. And seeing whatever is fit for us to ask in public is known sufficiently, why should not the expressions to be used on such occasions be defined also? Besides that, it is an ease to my mind, when I know before hand what I am to join in; and I confess there are very few men, with whose extempore prayers, I would willingly join. In extempore prayer also, it is too often found, that he that prays, will often more express and vent, his own private thoughts and passions, than the desires and wants of the congregation and church.

And seeing a prescribed form in general is on many accounts thus expedient or necessary in public, I think nothing can be objected against our *Liturgy*, either for the matter, or for the frame and composure of it. For it is for its matter, exactly agreeable to scripture and the genius of our religion; nothing prayed for or done, but what (as far as we can learn of his will by scripture) is acceptable to that great God, whom alone we serve and pray to; and for the composure of our *Liturgy*, it is in every thing, such as public devotions ought to be, and so exactly after the ancient pattern, filled with responses, hymns, prayers, thanksgivings, scriptures read, sermons

preached, sacraments administered, and all other occasional religious offices performed, that I cannot but admire it, and must profess my wonder and astonishment, that any persons really should either dislike or slight it.

In short, I am strictly regular, according to the rules of the *Liturgy* and command of the church; and I wish all men were even as I, and pity them that are not, and pray to God that they who are otherwise minded may be convinced and see their error. I thank God who hath given me so good an understanding in my duty, and hope, by my steadiness and good temper, to prevail with others. But yet I forbear judging or condemning all that do not exactly as I do, or that agree not with me in all these things, which though they are not fundamentals, yet are such things, as on which the flourishing of religion and the peace of the church do very much depend. For I consider some great prejudices may lie on their minds, which may in time be removed—that they may be in some involuntary mistakes, which may be corrected. But still I do not so much attend to other peoples scruples, as to be by them deterred from my own duty; for our holy religion, professed in this church, teacheth me to take care of my own practice, but not rashly to condemn other men. For I can make more excuses for others, than I can for myself, and for me to be wanting in any part of service or ceremony, I may justly think may be a greater fault, than for others, who perhaps know not, or mind not so much the reason and consequence of being strictly regular. At least, I am sure, their being guilty of a fault will not exclude me, if I act the same, and every man shall stand or fall to his own

*master.* And I am sure, it more becomes an humble and private christian to look after his own actions, than to be sharp in spying out, or severe in censuring the carriage of others.

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*From Bishop Wilson's Admonition to Parents.*

MOST parents are concerned for their children's present welfare, and too often renounce a good conscience, rather not provide for them; while few are careful to give them such instructions and examples, as by the grace of God, may secure them an eternal inheritance.

It is a strange stupidity, and they should be told of it, for parents to be much concerned to have their children dedicated to God in baptism, and yet utterly unconcerned how they behave themselves afterwards. The least that parents can do, is to instruct, or get instructed, their children, in the principles of the christian religion; to pray for them daily, and to see that they pray daily for themselves; to possess their minds with a love of goodness, and with an abhorrence of every thing that is wicked, and to take care that their natural corruption be not increased by evil examples.

It is a sad thing, to see children, under the very eye of their parents, and too often by their examples, getting habits of vanity, of idleness, of pride, of intemperance, of tale bearing, and many other sins which might be prevented by a christian education.

Parents therefore should be made sensible of their guilt, in suffering their children to take evil ways. They should often be told that human nature, being extremely corrupt, we need not be taught, and be at pains to go to hell; we shall go thither of course, if we do not make resistance, and are not re-

strained by the grace of God, and their own care and endeavour.

They should know, (*however loth they are to hear it,*) that they are their children's worst enemies, when they will see no faults in them; connive at what ought to be corrected, and are even pleased with what ought to be reprov'd.

In short, a parent who has any conscience of his duty, will not suffer the least sin to go unreprieved; but then he will take the Apostle's advice, *not to provoke their children to wrath* by a causeless or too great severity.

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HAS the reader made any advances in his spiritual career? Has he through the help of Divine grace, obtained any conquest over his spiritual foes? Let him remember that much still remains to be accomplished: that his victories must be followed up. Let him keep in view the splendour of that treasure, the stability of that kingdom which await him; a treasure that shall never fade, a kingdom that shall never be moved. Let him take to himself the whole armour of God; then though hosts of adversaries should assail him, he shall stand undaunted and unmoved: he shall lift his head above all his foes; and when he has fought the fight, the captain of his salvation, shall lead him on to victory and triumph, to glory and a crown.

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FEELING, is, in its very nature transient. It is at best but the meteor's blaze shedding strong, but momentary day, while principle, the true principle, be it faint at first, as the star, whose ray has nearly reached our earth, is yet the living light of the higher Heaven, which never more will leave us in utter darkness, but lend a steady beam to guide our way.